

Message Text

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AMCONSUL HONG KONG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 SEOUL 5799

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT KS

SUBJECT: CURRENT POLITICAL SCENE

REF: SEOUL 5564

BEGIN SUMMARY: PREDICTIONS OF POLITICAL CALM IN EMBASSY POLITICAL REVIEWS A YEAR AGO AND AGAIN LAST WINTER HAVE BEEN BORNE OUT AND WE NOW SEE EVEN LESS CHANCE THAT DWINDLING OPPOSITION ELEMENTS CAN MOUNT ANY REAL THREAT TO PRESIDENT PAK REGIME IN MEANTIME IS PROCEEDING WITH ANTI-CORRUPTION, IDEOLOGY BUILDING, AND WELFARE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND BROADEN POLITICAL SUPPORT. MAJOR QUESTION MARK IS OUTCOME OF MYONGDONG TRIAL WITH MANY PREDICTING PRESIDENT WILL BE LENIENT WITH SOME DEFENDANTS, BUT NO ONE KNOWING HOW KIM TAE-CHUNG WILL BE TREATED. THERE IS AWARENESS WITHIN BLUE HOUSE OF U.S. CONCERNS OVER HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOME KIND OF MEASURE TO LIGHTEN CONTROLS COULD BE INTRODUCED IN ANTICIPATION OF U.S. ELECTIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. THE DWINDLING OPPOSITION: FOR FIRST TIME SINCE 1972 WHEN HE

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INSTITUTED THE YUSHIN CONSTITUTION, WHICH GAVE HIM THE EMERGENCY

POWERS HE DEEMED NECESSARY TO INSURE SURVIVAL OF THE ROK AND HIS CONTINUATION IN POWER, PRESIDENT PAK CHONG-HUI HAS VIRTUALLY ELIMINATED ORGANIZED OPPOSITION TO HIS REGIME. REACTION TO THE MYONGDONG AFFAIR IN MARCH WAS A MILESTONE FOR THE GOVERNMENT. UNLIKE PAST EFFORTS BY OPPOSITION LEADERS TO ROUSE THE POPULACE THE ANTI-GOVERNMENT MYONGDONG DECLARATION ELICITED NO VISIBLE DOMESTIC SUPPORT; INSTEAD IT BROUGHT FORTH CRITICISM BOTH OF THEX OPPOSITION'S NAIVETE IN EXPECTING POPULAR RESPONSE, AS WELL AS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S FOLLOW-UP OVERREACTION IN ARRESTING THE SIGNERS. IN WAKE OF MYONGDONG, GOVERNMENT APPEARS IN STRONGER POSITION AND POLITICAL SCENE IS QUIETER THAN AT ANY TIME SINCE INTRO-R DUCATION OF YUSHIN.

2. NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP) IS A SHAMBLES FOLLOWING A BITTER INTERNECINE STRUGGLE FOR LEADERSHIP IN MAY. ALTHOUGH PARTY STALWARTS TALK ABOUT REORGANIZATION, MANY SHARE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SPEAKER CHONG IL-KWON'S VIEW THAT AT A MINIMUM IT WILL TAKE MONTHS TO HEAL THE DEEP WOUNDS THAT THE NDP HAS INFLICTED UPON ITSELF WITH THE FINANCIAL HELP THAT THE KCIA HAS GIVEN TO BOTH WARRING FACTIONS.

3. THROUGH USE OF LEGAL INSTRUMENTS AT HIS DISPOSAL AND PARTICULARLY EMERGENCY MEASURE NUMBER NINE, PARK HAS ALSO REDUCED THE OLD LINE POLITICIANS WHO OPPOSED HIM TO IMPOTENCE. KIM TAE-CHUNG IS ON TRIAL UNDER EMERGENCY MEASURE NUMBER NINE FOR HIS ROLE IN MYONGDONG, AS IS FORMER PRESIDENT YUN PO-SON AND NDP ASSEMBLYMAN DR. CHONG IL-HYONG. REGARDLESS TRIAL OUTCOME OPPOSITION LEADERS ARE LIKELY TO BE EFFECTIVELY PUT OUT OF POLITICAL ACTION EITHER AS JAIL INMATES OR AS PROBATIONERS.

4. ACADEMIC COMMUNITY HAS BEEN SILENCED BY A TENURE REFORM LAW THAT REPLACED PERMANENT TENURE WITH A MORE LIMITED CONTRACT SYSTEM. FEW PROFESSORS LOST THEIR JOBS FOR POLITICAL REASONS AS A RESULT OF THE FIRST ACADEMIC JOB REVIEW LAST FEBRUARY AND MARCH, (ALTHOUGH A NUMBER DID FOR ACADEMIC REASONS AND THE QUALITY OF TEACHING HAS BEEN SUBSTANTIALLY IMPROVED). IT WAS MADE CLEAR HOWEVER, THAT FACULTY MEMBERS WHO WISHED TO KEEP THEIR POSITIONS MUST CONCENTRATE ON TEACHING AND ENSURE THAT THEIR STUDENTS DO NOT GET OUT OF LINE.

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5. STUDENTS, TRADITIONAL SHOCK TROOPS OF THE OPPOSITION, REMAIN UNDER CONTROL AS RESULT PREEMPTIVE POLICE WORK, THE STUDENT DEFENSE CORPS, FEAR OF EXPULSION FROM UNIVERSITY, HEAVIER CLASS AND HOME WORK REQUIREMENTS, AND, THE HANDING DOWN OF STIFF JAIL SENTENCES TO THOSE STUDENTS ARRESTED FOR VIOLATIONS OF EM-9 FOR SUCH ACTS AS PASSING OUT ANTI-GOVERNMENT LEAFLETS ON CAMPUS. THE LESSON OF THE TRIALS AND SENTENCES HAS NOT BEEN LOST ON STUDENTS AND FORX MORE THAN ONE YEAR, QUIET HAS REIGNED ON CAMPUS. STUDENTS MAY GRUM-

BLE AND EVEN INTRIGUE PRIVATELY ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT, BUT STRIKINGLY, EVEN THEY FAILED TO TWITCH POLITICALLY OVER MYONGDONG.

6. WITH THE PRESS ALSO STILL QUIESCENT AS AN OPPOSITION FORCE, THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN KOREA NOW CONSTITUTES ONLY REMAINING SEMI-ORGANIZED OPPOSITION TO PRESIDENT PARK, AND IT DOES NOT HAVE POWER TO SERIOUSLY CHALLENGE PRESIDENT PARK'S POSITION BECAUSE IT IS DEEPLY DIVIDED BETWEEN THOSE WHO BELIEVE CHURCH SHOULD STAY OUT OF POLITICS AND THOSE WHO FAVOR SOCIAL ACTION. ONE INFLUENTIAL THIRD GENERATION PROTESTANT MISSIONARY HAS STATED, CHRISTIANITY IS BY ITS NATURE REVOLUTIONARY BECAUSE ITS CENTRAL PURPOSE IS TO CHANGE MAN AND HIS SOCIETY. THIS MAN BELIEVES THAT IN THE LONG RUN CONFLICT BETWEEN PRESIDENT PARK AND CHURCH WILL CONTINUE TO BE UNAVOIDABLE BECAUSE IT IS NOT IN PARK'S NATURE TO COMPROMISE AND TO ENLIST CHURCH SUPPORT. BUT THERE IS NOT EVEN AGREEMENT WITHIN THE CHURCH ON THIS POINT WITH MANY CONTENDING MAJOR COLLISION CAN AND WILL BE AVOIDED, IF ONLY BECAUSE THE PRESIDENT HAS ALL THE CARDS. MOST RECENTLY THE PRESIDENT'S REFUSAL TO PROSECUTE A GROUP OF URBAN MINISTERS ON COMMUNIST CONSPIRACY CHARGES HAS GIVEN THE CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP SOME CAUSE FOR REJOICING, BUT THEY CLEARLY REMAIN WARY AND UNCONVINCED THAT THE NEAR TERM FUTURE REALLY HOLDS ANYTHING MORE ACCEPTABLE FOR THEM.

7. ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, IT MUST BE POINTED OUT THAT ALL BUT THE MOST RADICAL OF THE OPPOSITIONISTS ARE PREPARED TO ADMIT THAT PRESIDENT PARK CONTINUES TO ACCOMPLISH MUCH IN THE WAY OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, WHILE PROVIDING SECURITY PROTECTION TO THE COUNTRY. A BASIC REASON FOR THE WITHERING OF THE OPPOSITION IS NOT JUST THE PRESIDENT'S ADROIT USE OF HIS POWERS, BUT IMPORTANTLY, CURRENT CONTENTMENT WITH THE STATUS QUO, EXCELLENT ECONOMIC PROSPECTS, AND SKEPTICISM EVEN AMONG NDP MEMBERS OVER THE OPPOSITION PARTY'S ABILITY TO DO AS WELL. MOREOVER, FEAR OF THE NORTH, WHICH HIT A HIGH POINT AFTER COLLAPSE OF VIETNAM, STILL EXISTS AND PARK IS CONFIDENTIAL

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CONSIDERED BY GREAT MAJORITY AS THE MOST COMPETENT MAN ON THE SCENE TO HANDLE THE SECURITY PROBLEM.

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8. CORRUPTION, IDEOLOGY, AND WELFARE: WITH VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE OPPOSITION CLEARLY CO-OPTED AND/OR UNDER CONTROL PARK REGIME HAS HAD TIME IN PAST YEAR INCREASINGLY TO TURN ITS ATTENTION TO WHAT IT SEES AS MORE POSITIVE POLITICAL PURSUITS.

9. AS FORECAST IN PRESIDENT PARK'S ANNUAL NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE AND OUR LAST WRAP-UP EARLY THIS YEAR GOVERNMENT HAS SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASED ITS EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ITS IMAGE AND WIN POLITICAL SUPPORT ON TWO MAJOR FRONTS: THE BATTLE AGAINST CORRUPTION AND IDEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT. CORRUPTION IS SEEN BY PARK AS SCOURGE OF MANY POORLY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND AS POTENTIAL ACHILLES HEEL, WHEREAS SOME FORM OF COMMONLY ACCEPTABLE IDEOLOGY, WHICH TAPS ROOTS OF KOREAN HERITAGE AND IS STILL MEANINGFUL IN MODERN TERMS, IS SEEN AS BEST WAY TO RALLY LONG TERM, CONTINUING POLITICAL SUPPORT. BESIDES ATTACKING CORRUPTION AND DEVELOPING IDEOLOGY, PRESIDENT CONTINUES TO STRESS SOCIAL AS WELL AS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

10. CORRUPTION: THERE SEEMS LITTLE DOUBT THAT GOVERNMENT
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UNDER PARK'S PERSONAL GUIDANCE IS MAKING DETERMINED EFFORT TO BRING CORRUPTION AT LOWER AND MIDDLE LEVELS UNDER SOMEWHAT BETTER CONTROL BY INCREASING PAY ON ONE HAND AND FIRING MISCREANTS ON OTHER. TOP OFFICERS OF SEVERAL LEADING BUSINESS FIRMS TESTIFY TO THIS, ONE SAYING THAT NORMALLY AT END OF JULY HIS FIRM PAID MANY "HELPFUL" ROKG EMPLOYEES ENOUGH TO TAKE SUMMER VACATIONS, BUT THIS YEAR FIRM HAS NOT PAID OFF

SINGLE OFFICIAL. TAX OFFICIALS SPECIFICALLY ARE REPORTEDLY WORKING HARDER ON TAX COLLECTION, LESS ON PERSONAL FUND RAISING. PETTY POLICE SHAKEDOWNS ARE LESS FREQUENT SAY SOME. THERE ARE OF COURSE MIXED REPORTS ON SUCCESS OF CAMPAIGN, AND GOVERNMENT CLAIMS REMAIN SUSPECT. BUT OVERALL THESE MEASURES APPEAR TO BE HAVING SOME EFFECT IN REDUCING DAILY CORRUPTION THAT EVERY KOREAN LIVES WITH AND IN PROVIDING BASIS FOR MORE LEGAL AND ORDERLY PROCEDURE.

11. AT HIGHER LEVELS, WE IMAGINE THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE CHANGE IN LEVELS OF EXTRA BUDGETARY FINANCING -- WE DO NOT REALLY KNOW-- BUT IT IS QUITE CLEAR FUNDS ARE NOW BEING FUNNELLED MORE EXCLUSIVELY TO BLUE HOUSE. REMOVAL LAST DECEMBER OF KIM CHONG-PIL AS PRIME MINISTER, WHO WAS AMONG OTHER THINGS LAST OF MAJOR, SEMI-INDEPENDENT "TAX COLLECTORS", AND APPOINTMENT OF CHOI KYU-HA WHO IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED HONEST IF INEFFECTIVE, HAS HAD THIS EFFECT. DIRECT PAYMENTS BY BUSINESS TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLYMEN, ARE ALSO REPORTEDLY DOWN AND CONSEQUENTLY THESE OFFICIALS ARE NOW EVEN MORE DEPENDENT ON BLUE HOUSE FOR EXTRACURRICULAR FUNDS THAN BEFORE. NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND POLITICAL PARTY POWER (GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS OPPOSITION) HAS DIMINISHED ACCORDINGLY TO NEWS LOWS.

12. IDEOLOGY: PARK'S IDEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORT HAS ALSO CRYSTALLIZED FURTHER SINCE BEGINNING OF YEAR. IN RECENT BRIEF BUT POINTED OUTLINE OF HIS VIEWS (SEOUL 5564) PRESIDENT DECLARED COMBINATION OF SAEMAUL SPIRIT CALLING FOR DILIGENCE AND COOPERATIVE EFFORTS AND YUSHIN CONSTITUTION AS PROVIDING FUNDAMENTAL IDEOLOGICAL GUIDELINES FOR NATION. ALL TOP GOVERNMENT AND BUSINESS LEADERS ARE BEING SENT TO SAEMAUL INSTITUTE IN SUWON SOUTH OF SEOUL FOR SHORT ONE TO TWO WEEK STINTS AND ARE ENJOINED TO SPIN OFF IN-HOUSE TRAINING COURSES IN THEIR OWN MINISTRIES AND BUSINESSES ON RETURN. SAEMAUL, WHICH HAS PROVED TO BE SUCCESSFUL SOCIO-ECONOMIC VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT
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MOVEMENT TO REPLACE ANTIQUATED, HEIRARCHIAL FEATURES OF COUNTRY SIDE WITH MORE MODERN TECHNOCRATIC APPROACH, AND SOME FEATURES OF PARTICIPATING GRASS ROOTS DEMOCRACY, IS MORE AND MORE FINDING ITS WAY INTO FACTORIES AND CITY COMMUNITIES, WHERE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS NOW SET UP TO TEACH SAEMAUL'S COOPERATIVE APPROACH. GOVERNMENT PARTY (DRP) HAS MOST RECENTLY PROPOSED NATIONAL SAEMAUL UNIVERSITY BE SET UP TO DEVELOP AND PROPAGATE SAEMAUL PRINCIPLES.

13. PRACTICALLY ORIENTED VILLAGE SIDE OF SAEMAUL PROGRAM CONTINUES TO WIN WIDE SUPPORT AND EVEN SUCH SOBER MEMBERS OF ROKG'S TOP LEADERSHIP AS DPM NAM DUCK-WOO RETURN FROM SUWON IMPRESSED BY MIX OF CASE BOOK STORIES OF SUCCESS TOLD BY FARMERS, SENSIBLE PEP TALKS ON HOW TO BE BETTER CITIZEN, AND

STRAIGHT NATIONALISTIC APPEALS. THERE REMAINS HOWEVER, SKEPTICISM IN INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY ABOUT PRESUMED POLITICAL MANIPULATIVE ASPECTS OF PROGRAM AND AMONG MORE SOPHISTICATED CITY DWELLERS MANY OF WHOM SHUN NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS AND DRAFT COOPERATIVE EFFORTS WITH QUESTION: WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

14. MOREOVER, ASIDE FROM SLOWER PROGRESS IN CITIES IN IMPLEMENTING PRACTICAL SAEMAU EFFORTS MANY KOREANS HAVE POINTED OUT TO US THAT YUSHIN CONSTITUTION AND "SAEMAU SPIRIT" BY NO MEANS AS YET COMPRISE COMPREHENSIVE OR UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED NATIONAL IDEOLOGICAL APPROACH, AND THUS REAL POLITICALLY CONGEALING AND MOTIVATING FORCE, THAT WESTERN CONSTITUTIONS AND MODES OF THOUGHT AND COMMUNISM PROVIDE THEIR VARIOUS PRACTITIONERS. ROK GOVERNMENT, SAYCRITICS, IS TRYING TO PRESCRIBE NATIONAL PHILOSOPHY IN TYPICAL OVER-NIGHT KOREAN FASHION, WHEREAS SUCH THINGS HAVE TAKEN CENTURIES TO EVOLVE ELSEWHERE. GOVERNMENT IS NONETHELESS INDEED HASTENING TO PROPAGATE ITS VISION OF THE FUTURE AND PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTING PLANS DESPITE NAYSAYERS. IT WILL BE OF CONTINUING INTEREST TO SEE HOW WELL THE ROKG IS ABLE TO TRANSLATE PRACTICAL SAEMAU SUCCESSES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE INTO PROGRESS TOWARD THE BROADER, MORE UNIVERSAL PHILOSOPHICAL GOALS PRESIDENT PARK HAS PROJECTED.

15. WELFARE: THIRD RECENT POSITIVE EFFORT DESIGNED AT LEAST IN PART TO ENLIST BROADER POLITICAL SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN INCREASED EMPHASIS IN JUST ANNOUNCED 4TH FIVE YEAR PLAN
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ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT EXPENDITURES ON EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND HOUSING; THESE WILL RISE FROM 18 PERCENT OF TOTAL INVESTMENT DURING 3RD FIVE YEAR PLAN TO 21 PERCENT IN NEXT FIVE YEARS. ROKG HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN MINDFUL OF POLITICAL DESIRABILITY FOR FAST GROWTH AND RELATIVELY EQUITABLE INCOME DISTRIBUTION IN THAT TRADITION, WITH MORE FUNDS AVAILABLE AS RESULT PAST ECONOMIC SUCCESSES, EVEN GREATER EMPHASIS WILL NOW BE PUT ON SOCIAL NEEDS OF POOR. WHILE THERE ARE SOUND ECONOMIC AND SIMPLE HUMANITARIAN REASONS FOR THIS, AS SHOWN IN RECENT URBAN INDUSTRIAL MISSION CASE, PARK IS PARTICULARLY CONCERNED ABOUT POTENTIAL POLITICAL DANGERS OF A LARGE URBAN UPRISING IN EVENT OF ECONOMIC DOWNTURN, AND HE SEES ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AS BEST WAY TO AVOID THIS. PARK'S PERSONAL INTEREST AND CONCERN WAS SHOWN BEST WHEN IN A SURPRISE MOVE EARLIER THIS MONTH HE SENT HIS FIVE YEAR ECONOMIC PLANNERS BACK TO THEIR DESKS TO COME UP WITH MEANS OF FINANCING AND IMPLEMENTING A PROGRAM OF BROADER MEDICAL COVERAGE FOR THE GREAT NUMBER OF POORER KOREANS WHO HAVE NOT PREVIOUSLY HAD ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE.

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16. AN ADDITIONAL RECENT EFFORT AT LEAST IN PART DESIGNED TO FOSTER IDEA THAT GOVERNMENT "CARES" IS NEW ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM TO BUILD IN POLLUTION AND OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL MEASURES AT EARLY STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT IN HOPE OF AVOIDING PROBLEMS SUCH AS JAPAN IS NOW FACING.

17. OUTLOOK: LITERALLY EVERY KOREAN WE TALK TO THESE DAYS INCLUDING RELIGIOUS AND ACADEMIC LEADERS AS WELL AS GOVERNMENT SUPPORTERS SHARES VIEW THAT PRESIDENT HAS NEVER BEEN IN FIRMER CONTROL OF SITUATION THAN NOW, AND THAT OUTLOOK IS FOR CONTINUED POLITICAL CALM ON PARK'S TERMS. TO BE SURE THERE IS DISSATISFACTION WITH PARK'S TOUGHNESS--AND NOT INCIDENTALLY CURRENT HEAVY TAXES ARE CONSTANTLY TALKED ABOUT AS REAL BURDEN. BUT DISSATISFACTION IS TEMPERED BY MIXTURE OF ACQUIESCENCE TO TIGHT CONTROLS, PRACTICAL SATISFACTION OVER ECONOMIC GAINS, AND BELIEF THAT EVEN IF PARK IS TOO TOUGH HE IS MORE RELIABLE LEADER THAN ANYONE ELSE ON SCENE. PERHAPS SITUATION IS BEST DESCRIBED BY FACT THAT UNLIKE PAST SUMMERS THERE IS NOW NO TALK WHATSOEVER OF POSSIBLE STUDENT OR RELIGIOUS OUTBREAKS THIS COMING FALL OR NEXT SPRING.

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18. AT SAME TIME DISCORDANT RUMORS ARE RIFE IN SEOUL ABOUT POSSIBILITIES OF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE, NEW ELECTIONS, TOUGHER POLICIES, MORE RELAXED POLICIES. TOP LEVEL OFFICIALS AMBASSADOR HAS JUST SEEN PRIOR TO STATESIDE TRIP, ALONG WITH OTHER KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES, LARGELY DISCOUNT THIS TALK HOWEVER, WITH CONCLUSION PRESIDENT IS CALM AND CONFIDENT WITH PRESENT LEVEL OF CONTROLS; HE REPORTEDLY SEES POLITICAL DISADVANTAGES OF THEM, PARTICULARLY OVERSEAS, BUT NOTES PAST RELAXATIONS LED TO OPPOSITION OUTBREAKS ON CAMPUSES AND ELSEWHERE. NONETHELESS, PARK IS EXPECTED TO BE RELATIVELY LENIENT WITH SENTENCING OF MOST MYONG-DONG DEFENDANTS ALTHOUGH OUTLOOK FOR KIM TAE-CHUNG IS CLOUDY. MOREOVER, OUR OWN ESTIMATE IS THAT OVERSEAS CONSIDERATIONS IF NOT PREDOMINANT WEIGHT IMPORTANTLY IN PRESIDENT'S MIND. IF KOREAN POLITICAL SCENE IN FACT REMAINS CALM AS WE EXPECT WE WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED TO SEE AT LEAST SOME CONCESSION BY PARK TO DOMESTIC AND U.S. HUMAN RIGHTS CRITICS PRIOR TO THIS FALL'S U.S. ELECTION. STERN

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